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ABSTRACT

This conference address discusses New York State programs for children and families, focusing on a mentoring program. New York State has 44 rural counties, which comprise 80% of the state's total area. Rural schools face limited financial resources and access to services. Rural school children are more likely to face failure than urban or suburban children because of rural economic stress, crime, substance abuse, and parental abuse and neglect. With 65,000 children in foster care, New York State has initiated the following efforts to improve the lives of children: (1) New York's Family Album compiles photographs and a profile of children available for adoption; (2) the Pre- and Postnatal Parenting Education Hospital Program provides parent education in every New York State Hospital with a maternity unit; (3) the Nutrition for Life curriculum for K-12th grade is free to every school in the State; and (4) the New York State Mentoring Program is a school-based program aimed at preventing school drop out. The mentoring program links at-risk children with caring, responsible adult volunteers from businesses and organizations. These volunteers help children with school work, personal problems, and development of self-esteem and self-confidence so that they can stay in school and reach their full potential. Mentors make a 1-year commitment to spend about 4 hours a month with a child. Technical assistance is available to help schools locate, screen, and train mentors. (KS)

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THE NEW YORK STATE MENTORING PROGRAM

by
Matilda Cuomo

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REMARKS BY MATILDA R. CUOMO
RURAL SCHOOLS PROGRAM ANNUAL CONFERENCE
OTESAGA HOTEL, COOPERSTOWN, NY
MONDAY, JULY 29, 1991 - 7:30 P.M.

IT'S A PLEASURE TO BE HERE FOR THE RURAL SCHOOLS ANNUAL CONFERENCE. AS A FORMER SCHOOL TEACHER, IT'S A SPECIAL PLEASURE TO ADDRESS SUCH A DISTINGUISHED GROUP OF EDUCATION LEADERS ... MEN AND WOMEN COMMITTED TO THE EDUCATION OF OUR CHILDREN IN RURAL COMMUNITIES.

WE COMMEND THE RURAL SCHOOLS PROGRAM FOR ITS EFFECTIVE EFFORTS TO STRENGTHEN SMALL SCHOOL DISTRICTS AND MAXIMIZE THEIR RESOURCES.

IT'S AMAZING HOW MANY PEOPLE OUTSIDE NEW YORK STATE, AND EVEN IN THE STATE, DON'T REALIZE HOW MUCH OF OUR STATE IS RURAL. OUR 44 RURAL COUNTIES, WHICH COMPRISE 80 PERCENT OF THE STATE'S TOTAL AREA, AND SOME THREE MILLION PEOPLE, ARE A VITAL PART OF THIS DIVERSE STATE -- INTEGRAL TO OUR IDENTITY, OUR ECONOMY, AND OUR QUALITY OF LIFE.

THAT IS WHY IN 1986, THE GOVERNOR CREATED THE FIRST CABINET-LEVEL OFFICE OF RURAL AFFAIRS IN THE COUNTRY. WE'RE DELIGHTED THAT JUNE O'NEILL, DIRECTOR DESIGNATE OF THE OFFICE IS HERE WITH US THIS EVENING. JUNE HAS DONE AN EXEMPLARY JOB RAISING AWARENESS TO THE SPECIFIC CONCERNS AND ISSUES OF RURAL COMMUNITIES.

NO ONE KNOWS BETTER THAN ALL OF YOU, THAT RURAL SCHOOLS FACE DISTINCT CHALLENGES IN ENSURING THAT ALMOST 500,000 CHILDREN IN OUR RURAL SCHOOLS RECEIVE A QUALITY EDUCATION. WITH SPARSE POPULATIONS, FEW LARGE LOCAL EMPLOYERS, AND GREAT GEOGRAPHICAL DISTANCES, RURAL SCHOOLS OFTEN HAVE LIMITED FINANCIAL RESOURCES, AS WELL AS LIMITED ACCESS TO SERVICES AND MATERIALS WHICH ARE MORE READILY AVAILABLE TO SUBURBAN AND URBAN SCHOOLS.

YET, RURAL SCHOOLS ALSO HAVE UNIQUE STRENGTHS. PERHAPS THEIR GREATEST IS THAT RURAL SCHOOLS ARE OFTEN THE CENTER OF COMMUNITY LIFE -- THERE'S A STRONG SENSE OF OWNERSHIP AND A GREAT SPIRIT OF COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT.

# # #

I WISH WE COULD SAY THAT ONE OF THE UNIQUE STRENGTHS AND CHARACTERISTICS OF RURAL SCHOOL CHILDREN IS THAT THEY ARE IMMUNE TO THE SOCIETAL STRESSES THAT CAUSE FAMILY DYSFUNCTION.

BUT WE CAN'T. IN FACT, A 1989 REPORT BY THE NATIONAL RURAL DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE FOUND THAT RURAL SCHOOL CHILDREN ARE MORE LIKELY TO FACE FAILURE BECAUSE OF CRIME, SUBSTANCE ABUSE AND ALCOHOL ABUSE, PARENTAL ABUSE AND NEGLECT OR OTHER FACTORS THAN URBAN OR SUBURBAN CHILDREN. IN RURAL FAMILIES, STRESS IS INCREASED AS OUR ECONOMY CHANGES TO A SERVICE-BASED ECONOMY, OFTEN REQUIRING PARENTS TO SEEK OUT NEW LIVELIHOODS AND JOB SKILLS.

IN ALL OF OUR COMMUNITIES, HOMELESSNESS, SUICIDE, SUBSTANCE ABUSE, CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT AND ALL FORMS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE HAVE ESCALATED. WE HAVE 65,000 CHILDREN IN FOSTER CARE IN NEW YORK STATE; 400,000 NATIONALLY .... OVER 1,000 CHILDREN ARE LEGALLY FREE FOR ADOPTION IN NEW YORK STATE; AND 50,000 NATIONALLY. THESE CHILDREN ARE THE REAL VICTIMS OF DYSFUNCTIONAL FAMILIES.

TO HELP FIND GOOD ADOPTIVE FAMILIES FOR THESE CHILDREN, WE'VE CREATED NEW YORK'S FAMILY ALBUM, WHICH IS AN INNOVATIVE NEW TOOL TO SHOWCASE THESE CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS IN LIVING COLOR PHOTOGRAPHS AND A PERSONALITY PROFILE IN THE CHILDREN'S OWN WORDS, TO CAPTURE THEIR INDIVIDUAL BEAUTY. THESE CHILDREN WERE BABIES. THEY ARE GETTING OLDER. IF YOU KNOW ANYONE THINKING ABOUT ADOPTION, PLEASE TELL THEM ABOUT OUR NEW YORK FAMILY ALBUM.

THE DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES SUPPLIES FINANCIAL SUPPORT AND SERVICES -- TRAINING, COUNSELING AND SELF-HELP GROUPS TO HELP THE FAMILIES FLOURISH.

WE'VE LEARNED THAT PREVENTION IS THE KEY! WE MUST ADDRESS THE NEEDS OF TROUBLED FAMILIES AND VULNERABLE CHILDREN BEFORE THE FAMILY BREAKS-UP OTHERWISE OUR WHOLE SOCIETY PAYS LATER. LITERALLY PAYS! WE PAY FOR PEDIATRIC INTENSIVE CARE UNITS, FOR ALL KINDS OF SPECIAL EDUCATION, DRUG TREATMENT AND REHAB CLINICS, WELFARE DEPENDENCY, AND NEW PRISONS.

IN THESE TIMES, IT SEEMS THAT TOO MANY OF OUR CHILDREN ARE GROWING UP WITHOUT ENOUGH PARENTAL SUPPORT, GOOD ROLE MODELS, GUIDANCE, AND DIRECTION ... WITHOUT LEARNING BASIC AND ESSENTIAL VALUES. AS THE GOVERNOR SAYS -- OUT OF COMPASSION OR SELF-INTEREST, IT IS IMPERATIVE THAT WE GIVE OUR CHILDREN THE SUPPORT, ENCOURAGEMENT, AND MOTIVATION, TO DEVELOP THE ACADEMIC AND EMOTIONAL SKILLS TO SUCCEED IN SCHOOL AND IN THE WORK PLACE OF THE 21ST CENTURY.

HE INITIATED THE DECADE OF THE CHILD, A LONG-TERM COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH TO SEE THAT OUR CHILDREN ARE NOURISHED, CARED-FOR, AND EDUCATED ... AND THAT OUR FAMILIES HAVE THE SUPPORT TO TAKE CONTROL OF THEIR LIVES.

# # #

FOR ALMOST NINE YEARS, I'VE HAD A GREAT OPPORTUNITY TO BE INVOLVED WITH MANY SOCIAL, HEALTH, AND EDUCATION PROGRAMS.

UNDER THE DECADE OF THE CHILD, WE HAVE NEW YORK'S STATEWIDE "PARENTING" EDUCATION PROGRAM, CALLED THE PRE- AND POSTNATAL PARENTING EDUCATION HOSPITAL PROGRAM OR "PPPEHP." WE START AT THE VERY BEGINNING! AS A RESULT OF THE PRE-NATAL PART OF THIS PROGRAM AND THE EFFECTIVE BOOK, "HAVING A BABY: A FAMILY GUIDE TO PREGNANCY" AND ALL OUR AGGRESSIVE EFFORTS TO EDUCATE PREGNANT WOMEN AND EXPAND ACCESS TO VITAL PRENATAL CARE SERVICES, IN 1990, NEW YORK STATE'S INFANT MORTALITY RATE DECLINED BY ABOUT 5% -- THAT'S THE LARGEST DROP SINCE THE EARLY 1980's.

BRIEFLY, PPPEHP IS IN EVERY NEW YORK STATE HOSPITAL WITH A MATERNITY UNIT, GIVING NEW PARENTS A STRONG FOUNDATION OF POSITIVE PARENTING SKILLS. EVERY NEW MOTHER RECEIVES ANOTHER FREE PUBLICATION, CALLED WELCOME TO PARENTHOOD, AND THE ADVICE AND SUPPORT OF HOSPITAL PROFESSIONALS IN THE MATERNITY UNIT BEFORE SHE TAKES HER NEW BABY HOME.

BECAUSE OF POOR PARENTING, MANY CHILDREN AREN'T LEARNING BASIC SKILLS AT HOME. EVEN SIMPLE THINGS, LIKE HOW TO EAT NUTRITIOUSLY, THE NEED FOR EXERCISE, AND COUNSELING ABOUT HOW TO DEVELOP A RESPECT FOR THEIR BODY AND TO IMPROVE THEIR TOTAL WELL-BEING.

ALSO UNDER THE "DECADE OF THE CHILD," NEW YORK STATE HAS A COMPREHENSIVE NUTRITION FOR LIFE CURRICULUM FOR K-12TH GRADE, WHICH IS FREE TO EVERY SCHOOL -- PUBLIC OR PRIVATE -- IN THE STATE. NUTRITION FOR LIFE HELPS CHILDREN FORM GOOD EATING HABITS, LIVE HEALTHIER LIVES, BECOME BETTER CONSUMERS, AND, AS ADULTS, HAVE THE CAPACITY TO RAISE HEALTHIER FAMILIES OF THEIR OWN WHEN THEY BECOME PARENTS.

WE'RE PLEASED THAT NEW YORK STATE IS RECOGNIZED AS A NATIONAL LEADER IN NUTRITION EDUCATION. IN FACT, 45 OTHER STATES AND THREE COUNTRIES HAVE PURCHASED OUR CURRICULUM FOR THEIR OWN USE. WE ALSO HAVE 12 REGIONAL COORDINATORS WHO ARE PART OF OUR HEALTH EDUCATION AND SERVICES NETWORK WHO SERVE AS THE LIAISONS BETWEEN THE SCHOOLS, COMMUNITY AND STATE RESOURCES.

WE KNOW THAT AN ESPECIALLY STRESSFUL TIME FOR FAMILIES -- PARENTS AND CHILDREN -- IS DURING THE PRE ADOLESCENT AND ADOLESCENT STAGE. I KNOW ALL ABOUT THIS STAGE, I WENT THROUGH IT FIVE TIMES WITH MY FIVE CHILDREN!

UNFORTUNATELY, RURAL YOUNGSTERS ACCOUNT FOR ALMOST 14 PERCENT OF ALL TEEN BIRTHS IN NEW YORK STATE. AND, 39 OF THE 50 SCHOOL DISTRICTS WITH THE "HIGHEST" SCHOOL DROP OUT RATES IN THE STATE ARE IN RURAL COUNTIES. AND MANY RURAL STUDENTS ARE FAR LESS LIKELY TO CONTINUE ON TO A FOUR-YEAR COLLEGE. COLLEGES RECRUITING STUDENTS ARE REALIZING THIS FACT!

THIS HAS SERIOUS CONSEQUENCES! OUR CHILDREN WILL BE COMPETING IN A GLOBAL ECONOMY. WITHOUT A SOLID EDUCATION, THEY FACE A FUTURE OF LIMITED OPPORTUNITY. LOUIS HARRIS RECENTLY WROTE THAT "EXECUTIVES IN THE 200 LARGEST U.S. CORPORATIONS WILL TELL YOU THE FUNCTIONAL ILLITERACY RATE AMONG THEIR EMPLOYEES WAS ABOUT 8 PERCENT A GENERATION AGO; NOW IT IS ROUGHLY 25 PERCENT." WHEREAS IN KOREA, JAPAN, AND GERMANY, THE ILLITERACY RATE IS CLOSE TO ZERO.

AS NOTED IN THE FINAL REPORT OF THE NATIONAL COMMISSION ON CHILDREN, WITHOUT GOOD ROLE MODELS, CHILDREN "HAVE FEW OPPORTUNITIES TO ACQUIRE THE ATTITUDES AND HABITS THAT LEAD TO SUCCESS IN SCHOOL, PRODUCTIVE EMPLOYMENT, AND STRONG, STABLE FAMILIES.

AS AN ADDED SUPPORT FOR FAMILIES -- TO ALLEVIATE FAMILY STRESS AND PREVENT SCHOOL DROP OUT, WE ESTABLISHED THE NEW YORK STATE MENTORING PROGRAM -- THE ONLY SCHOOL-BASED STATEWIDE ONE-TO-ONE MENTORING PROGRAM WHICH PROVIDES GOOD ROLE MODELS WHEN CHILDREN NEED THEM MOST -- EARLY -- IN THE ELEMENTARY, MIDDLE SCHOOL AND JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL YEARS. I WANT TO TAKE THIS OPPORTUNITY TO BRIEFLY TELL YOU ABOUT THE NEW YORK STATE MENTORING PROGRAM BECAUSE WE BELIEVE THAT MENTORING IS A SOLUTION TO THE PROBLEM OF SCHOOL DROP OUT.

EXPERTS, LIKE DR. ERNEST BOYER, PRESIDENT OF THE CARNEGIE FOUNDATION FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF TEACHING, ASSURE US THAT IF EVERY AT-RISK CHILD HAD A MENTOR WHO TRULY CARED, THAT ONE ACT COULD CUT THE DROP OUT RATE IN HALF.

THE NEW YORK STATE MENTORING PROGRAM LINKS CHILDREN WITH CARING, RESPONSIBLE ADULT VOLUNTEERS FROM BUSINESSES AND ORGANIZATIONS, WHO HELP THE CHILD WITH SCHOOL WORK, PERSONAL PROBLEMS, AND DEVELOP SELF-ESTEEM AND SELF-CONFIDENCE IN THE CHILD TO STAY IN SCHOOL AND REACH HIS OR HER FULL POTENTIAL.

CURRENTLY, IBM, NYNEX, NIAGARA MOHAWK, FLEET NORSTAR, CHEMICAL BANK, AND THE RETIRED TEACHERS ASSOCIATION, ARE AMONG THE MANY BUSINESSES AND ORGANIZATIONS SUPPLYING MENTORS TO CHILDREN IN THE NEW YORK STATE MENTORING PROGRAM. MENTORS CAN COME FROM SMALL LOCAL BUSINESSES, FROM CIVIC OR CHURCH ORGANIZATIONS, THE VOLUNTEER FIRE DEPARTMENT, OR FROM A SENIOR CITIZENS FACILITY -- OR A COMBINATION OF SOURCES.

MENTORS MAKE A ONE-YEAR COMMITMENT TO SPEND ABOUT FOUR HOURS A MONTH WITH A CHILD -- A SMALL INVESTMENT OF TIME THAT CAN BE A BIG INVESTMENT FOR THE CHILD. WE HELP SCHOOLS SCREEN AND TRAIN THE MENTORS, THE SCHOOL-BASED COORDINATOR, WHO IS APPOINTED BY THE PRINCIPAL, AND EVEN TRAIN THE MENTEES. WE CREATE THE STRUCTURE, ASSIST IN LOCATING MENTOR SOURCES FOR THE SCHOOL, AND DESIGN EACH PROGRAM TO ACCOMMODATE THE NEEDS OF THE SCHOOL AND THE ORGANIZATION SUPPLYING THE MENTORS.

THAT'S THE BEAUTY OF OUR PROGRAM.

WE RECOGNIZE THAT WHAT WORKS IN THE BRONX -- FOR EXAMPLE, WHERE THE MENTOR SOURCE IS LOCATED CLOSE ENOUGH THAT MENTORS CAN WALK TO THE SCHOOL ON THEIR LUNCH HOUR -- DOESN'T NECESSARILY WORK IN BOONEVILLE WHERE SCHOOLS AND BUSINESSES ARE SEPARATED BY LARGE DISTANCES -- AND THERE'S NO SUBWAY IN BETWEEN!

TO ASSIST IN OVERCOMING THESE OBSTACLES, WE HAVE A VOLUNTEER REGIONAL TEAM DRAWN FROM THE COMMUNITY. RURAL COMMUNITIES HAVE AN ADVANTAGE OVER BIG CITIES, WITH THE TRADITION OF VOLUNTEER SERVICE TO THE SCHOOLS. THE NEW YORK STATE MENTORING PROGRAM IS AN EXCELLENT OPPORTUNITY TO CAPITALIZE ON THAT TRADITION.

ADDITIONALLY, OUR CENTRAL STAFF HAS TWO ASSISTANT DIRECTORS WHO HAVE BEEN ASSIGNED TO OVERSEE THE IMPLEMENTATION OF PROGRAMS AND PROVIDE TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE TO RURAL SCHOOLS ACROSS THE STATE.

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BECAUSE OF THE SUPPORT OF EDUCATION COMMISSIONER THOMAS SOBOL AND SUPERINTENDENTS AND PRINCIPALS, LIKE YOU, ACROSS THE STATE, BY THE END OF THIS YEAR, WE WILL HAVE PROGRAMS IN 60 SCHOOLS, INVOLVING MORE THAN 1,000 MENTORS AND MENTEES. AMONG THE PROGRAMS STARTING THIS FALL, THERE WILL BE ONE AT CUMBERLAND HEAD ELEMENTARY SCHOOL IN CLINTON COUNTY'S BEEKMANTOWN CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT, AND ANOTHER AT EDWARD TOWN MIDDLE SCHOOL IN THE NIAGARA WHEATFIELD CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT IN NIAGARA COUNTY. ADDITIONALLY, TEN OTHER SCHOOL DISTRICTS IN RURAL COMMUNITIES HAVE EXPRESSED INTEREST IN STARTING PROGRAMS NEXT YEAR.

AS SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS, WITH CONNECTIONS THROUGHOUT THE COMMUNITY, YOU CAN IDENTIFY A REGIONAL COORDINATOR WHO CAN SPEARHEAD THE TEAM -- IT REQUIRES ABOUT 10 HOURS A MONTH, AND THE BENEFITS ARE WORTH THE EFFORT.

I'M SURE THAT MANY OF YOU KNOW JUDY KATZ, THE IMMEDIATE PAST PRESIDENT OF THE NEW YORK STATE SCHOOL BOARD ASSOCIATION. JUDY IS OUR WESTERN NEW YORK REGIONAL CHAIRPERSON. WE ARE QUITE FORTUNATE TO HAVE HER ON OUR TEAM.

IF YOU ARE A SUPERINTENDENT, WE HOPE YOU WILL ENCOURAGE ALL THE K-8 PRINCIPALS IN YOUR DISTRICT TO IMPLEMENT A PROGRAM. AND OF COURSE, WE HOPE YOU WILL ALL CONSIDER BECOMING A MENTOR YOURSELVES.

# # #

I KNOW FIRST-HAND HOW MENTORING IMPROVES A CHILD'S LIFE.

I MET MY MENTEE, ELY DELGADO, WHEN SHE WAS IN THE SIXTH GRADE. ELY IS NOW 13 AND A STUDENT AT ALBANY LIVINGSTON JUNIOR HIGH. IN THE TIME THAT ELY AND I HAVE BEEN TOGETHER, SHE HAS IMPROVED IN ALL HER SUBJECTS ... AND SHE IS BEGINNING TO THINK ABOUT HER FUTURE, SHE WANTS TO BE AN ATTORNEY -- NOT A TEACHER, LIKE ME. I THINK MY DAUGHTER MADELINE, WHO IS AN ATTORNEY, HAD MORE INFLUENCE ON HER!

A MENTOR GETS THE GREATEST SATISFACTION KNOWING HE OR SHE IS MAKING A DIFFERENCE IN THE LIFE OF A CHILD. THAT'S WHY WE'RE WORKING DILIGENTLY TO ENCOURAGE EVERY SCHOOL DISTRICT TO START A MENTORING PROGRAM, AND URGE MORE AND MORE COMPANIES AND ORGANIZATIONS TO MAKE A COMMITMENT TO MENTORING. WE BROUGHT MATERIALS; THEY ARE AVAILABLE ON THE TABLE IN THE LOBBY.

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FRANKLIN DELANO ROOSEVELT ONCE REMINDED US THAT "THE TEST OF OUR PROGRESS IS NOT WHETHER WE ADD MORE TO THE ABUNDANCE OF THOSE WHO HAVE MUCH; IT IS WHETHER WE PROVIDE ENOUGH FOR THOSE WHO HAVE TOO LITTLE.

TOGETHER, WE CAN MAKE THE 1990's THE DECADE WE PROVIDED OUR CHILDREN -- OUR MOST PRECIOUS NATURAL RESOURCE -- ENOUGH ... ENOUGH LOVE, ENOUGH SUPPORT, AND ENOUGH EDUCATION TO MAKE THEIR DREAMS OF A GOOD LIFE AND A BRIGHT FUTURE BECOME REALITIES.

WE CAN DO IT, <u>TOGETHER</u>. THANK YOU.